WAGNER'S TANNHÄUSER

as retold by Oliver Huckel

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TANNHÄUSER: By RICHARD WAGNER
RETOLD BY OLIVER HUCKEL

Tannhäuser and the Bride of Death

Tannhäuser

A·DRAMATIC·POEM·BY·RICHARD WAGNER·FREELY·TRANSLATED IN·POETIC·NARRATIVE·FORM·BY

Oliver·Huckel

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FOREWORD

PROFESSOR Albert Lavignac of the Conservatoire at Paris asks the question, "Which was greater in Wagner, — the poet or the musician, the musical composer or the dramatist?" He answers it by saying that Wagner was a genius whose thought assumed with equal facility the poetic or the musical form. He combined them in one art, and carried them to their utmost power.

There may be dissentients from this view. Nevertheless, with the growing appreciation of Wagner's music, it must be acknowledged that there is also an increasing interest in his poetic and dramatic work. He is unique among composers in writing both the words and the music of his great works. He is a splendid poet-musician, remarkable in both qualities.

He wrote his poems for music. They are not ordinary librettos. They are dramatic poems of noble conception and composition. Perhaps this has been sometimes forgotten under the spell and genius of the music. In this volume the poem itself claims our first attention. Wagner often felt that people more readily appreciated his music than his drama, and had not therefore really entered into his full meaning. He wrote once: "The Tannhäuser which I witnessed last evening was my score here and there, but the drama of it put aside." It may be therefore profitable to study, as we do here, the drama without the music.

This story of Tannhäuser, "in the skilful weav-

ing of the dramatic web out of materials scattered and apparently unrelated, gives a complete demonstration of Wagner's masterly powers as a dramatist and dramatic poet."

The first conception of the drama was in 1841. Scenic sketches were made in 1842, and the poem was finally finished on May 22, 1843. Tannhäuser and Lohengrin were both conceived in poetic vision about the same time, and from the same sources, and a glimpse of Parsifal was also seen at this period. Tannhäuser was written before Lohengrin and long before Parsifal. They show the inner development of the poet's mind and heart. He was working out his artistic destiny and consummation.

The literary sources of this Wagnerian story of Tannhäuser are probably three distinct ones. The first is the legend of Tannhäuser, found in many forms in old German ballads and tales, and in which the ending is quite different from the climax that Wagner makes, — not a saving of the soul, but a return to Venus. The second source was a collection of poems of the thirteenth century called the "Wartburgkrieg." This gives some intimate pictures of the court of Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, a famous patron of poetry and song, and it describes a poetic contest or debate on the glories of certain princes. Wagner took what he wanted of these poems, and adapted them to his purposes, — making Tannhäuser one of the minnesingers of his story. The third source was the history of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, the daughter-in-law of Landgrave Hermann of

Thuringia. She furnishes the suggestion for the beautiful character, pure and lofty, of the Elizabeth of Wagner's drama, the direct contrast to the evil and voluptuous Venus. Elizabeth had not been mentioned in these previous sources. This third source thus gave what was needed for the exquisite portrait of one of the noblest of Wagner's heroines.

It seems rather incongruous at first to find the strange name of Frau Venus in this ancient Teutonic legend. But we must remember that old Germany had taken on much of classic lore from its Roman conquerors. The Venus of the Romans, the goddess of love and beauty,—essentially the Aphrodite of the Greeks, and the Astarte of the Phoenicians,—had pushed aside the old Teutonic goddess Freya, the wife of Odin, queen and leader of the Valkyres; Hel, the goddess of the underworld and the dead; and Holda, the goddess of the spring, of budding and fructification; and gradually all the attributes of these had mingled in Frau Venus. The common people did not readily part with this old poetic mythology of nature, but even after they became Christian, they merely supposed these older and displaced deities to be dwelling in caves and mountains.

A few references to the scene of the drama may be appropriate. The castle of the Wartburg is a noble old structure in Thuringia, near Eisenach, dating from 1070. It was the official residence of the Landgraves of Thuringia until the extinction of the family in 1247. It has been restored to its original style and ornamentation,

and is now the occasional residence of the Grand-Duke of Weimar. It is famous for the medieval minstrel tournaments at the time of Landgrave Hermann I (about 1190-1217); and also has a peculiar interest as the refuge of Martin Luther at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Here is still shown the room, with many memorials, where Luther worked on his translation of the Bible, — a translation which was to mean so much in the language and literature of Germany.

The Horselberg, where according to tradition is situated the cave of Venus, is a long, deeply furrowed ridge (about one thousand five hundred and seventy-five feet high), some ten or twelve miles from Eisenach and the Wartburg.

The personages described in the song contest are historical. Wolfram von Eschenbach was a knightly champion of Christianity and of the virtues of woman. Walther von der Vogelweide was a Tyrolean poet of renown. Reimar and Biterolf were also notable poets of their day.

There are some unusually fine poetic touches in the drama. Recall Tannhäuser in thrall to Venus in the underworld, longing to hear the song of birds and once more to suffer pain. Notice that Venus has real love and womanly feeling. Notice also that Tannhäuser's cry to the Virgin is the only means of breaking the spell. Then note the contrast between the red revels of the halls of Venus and the green valleys before the Wartburg where the sheep-bells tinkle. See "the pomp and circumstance of the medie-

val contest." Recall Wolfram's ode to the evening star. Remember Tannhäuser's return from Rome, and the contest of his feelings, — "one of the most intensely tragic pieces of writing in all dramatic literature." Recall that fine touch, — the sainted Elizabeth, dead, is still the guardian angel of this poor wanderer. Fine fancy in a hundred places shows Wagner the poet. Recall that striking appeal, — Elizabeth's earnest prayer for the salvation of Tannhäuser. Although struck to the heart by more than mortal wound, Elizabeth thinks first of him: "What matters it to me? But he, his salvation! Would you rob him of his eternal salvation?" Has not Wagner here wrought with the stroke of genius?

The opening of the drama has two versions, called the Dresden and the Parisian versions. The latter is a much fuller revelation of the character of Venus; it is usually the one now used, and seemed best liked by Wagner. The drama also has two endings, — a longer and a shorter. In the latter, one sees neither Venus nor the funeral procession of Elizabeth. These are indicated merely by the distant lights in the grotto of Venus, and the funeral knells tolled by the bells of the Wartburg. The present volume slightly abbreviates the Parisian opening, but uses the longer ending of the drama. Wolfram's Song to the Evening Star and the Final Hymn have both been lengthened to give the effect which musical repetition and prolongation give in the actual opera.

The poem as indicated was written by 1843; the

music was completed in 1845. But before any production of the work could be given, Wagner had plunged into politics and made many enemies. He associated himself in 1846 with August Roeckel and with the revolutionist Bakounine in militant politics. He made some very imprudent speeches, and afterwards fled from Dresden to Weimar, where his friend Liszt was directing rehearsals for Tannhäuser. But rumor came that his arrest was ordered as a dangerous agitator, and he left the country under a fictitious passport, and became an exile for twelve years.

He went to Paris; then to Zurich, where he lived and worked for some time, and where he gave Tannhäuser. In 1855 he went to London to direct eight concerts of the Philharmonic Society. Among other selections of his own he gave the overture to Tannhäuser. It excited general enthusiasm, while the royal family summoned the author to their box to receive congratulations. In 1859 Napoleon III, at the instance of Mme. de Metternich and others, gave orders for a great performance of Tannhäuser in Paris, which scored a splendid success. It was for this performance that the Venusberg scenes were enlarged. Another epoch was in 1864, when young King Ludwig II of Bavaria called Wagner to his court, and bestowing honor and wealth upon him, commanded him to complete the Nibelungen Lied series, and to have his other works magnificently represented. The king had a splendid and unique performance of Tannhäuser given in Munich. Thereafter it was given

in many cities, and became one of Wagner's most popular works.

A few words concerning the music. As Professor Lavignac, whom we have already cited, says: "Wagner has two languages at his command, two means of making himself understood by his fellow men,—poetry and music; which, being united, form but one language with an absolutely matchless intensity of expression. By means of poetry Wagner reveals to us the outward man, who speaks and acts; by means of music, he enables us to penetrate into the secret thoughts of the inner man; with music, also, he raises us above terrestrial humanity and transports us into the supernatural regions of the ideal." Wonderful music is this of Tannhäuser. The Song of the Sirens, the Dance of the Bacchantes, The Hymn to Venus, The Romance of the Star, The Pilgrim's Chorus,—each has its own charm. But the great overture is a magnificent inspiration. It paints the whole picture, and voices the whole deep struggle. It is thrilling, almost overpowering, in its agonies, beseechings, strugglings, and glorious triumph.

The inner significance of the Tannhäuser drama is manifest. The bacchanals in the Venus scenes typify "the gratification of the senses," while the pilgrims portray "the higher desires of man." Elizabeth represents the loftiest embodiment of desire, the eternal woman-soul which "leadeth us ever upward and on." Wagner makes the saving principle in his tragic story the principle of "self-effacement, a love faithful unto death."

Fore-word

It has been said that Tannhäuser is a man's story; that women never find in it what a man finds there; that the experience of the story lies beyond the pale of the feminine nature, and therefore cannot be fully appreciated by them. However this may be, yet there is an appeal and fascination in the story for every soul. It touches something vital and universal. In the experience of Tannhäuser, as the musical and dramatic critic, W. J. Henderson, rightly asserts, "Wagner has set before us the struggle of the pure and the impure, the lusts and the aspirations of man's nature. It is essentially the tragedy of a man. Tannhäuser is typical of every man, beset on the one hand by the desire of the flesh which satiates and maddens, and courted on the other by the undying loveliness of chaste and holy love. If ever a sermon was preached as to the certainty with which the sins of the flesh will find a man out, it is preached in this tremendous tragedy, when the flame of old passions sears the flesh of new happiness and drives the errant out of paradise. Wagner, out of the old Tannhäuser myth, fashioned the tragedy of a man's soul. Every man must bow his head in reverence to the genius which thus made quick the battle of passion against purity for the possession of man's soul. Wagner wrote no mightier tragedy than this."

This present series of interpretations (of which this volume is the third) has thus treated three great dramas,— Parsifal, Lohengrin and Tannhäuser, —all closely connected, and each one a superb portrayal of some vital truth of life. They

are exquisite in the artistic beauty of their legends, and thrilling with the surge of the mighty problems with which they struggle. Parsifal means enlightenment and salvation through suffering; Lohengrin portrays unquestioning faith as the basis of noblest and happiest life; Tannhäuser is a parable of the redemptive power of a pure and unselfish love.

OLIVER HUCKEL

TANNHÄUSER. PART I

IN THE HILL OF VENUS

LOSE to the peaceful vale of Eisenach,
In far Thuringia, towers a gloomy mount,
The Horselberg, a grim and lonely pile,
Long called "the hill of Venus," with its cave, —
Unfathomed depths of subterranean gloom, —
Where men have lost their souls in heathen love
To that fair goddess of the evil heart,
Who, banished from the light by the white Christ,
Holds now her court and pagan revelries,
Deep in the dark abysses of the earth.

Come near and gaze into the desperate depths!
For now the Horselberg is gaping wide,
And music of the revels issues forth,
Reëchoing from the rocky halls and walls.
The fair, false Venus holds her court to-day.
See far within! behold the great cave's breadth!
See there the sparkling, flashing waterfall,
Plunging in foam across the mossy rocks
To winding waters of a happy brook
That purls and flashes through the flowery fields.
Far off a crystal lake of shimmering blue,
Where graceful naiads toss the shining waves,
With laughter shouting in their merry baths;
Along the lake's white strand, fair sirens rest
Within the grateful shade of noble trees.
A rosy light, like the first flush of dawn,
Illumines all the cave with sunrise tints.
Here are a group of nymphs in airy dance

Of fairy circles, while amid the groves
Are pairs of blushing lovers, dimly seen,
Reclining blissful on the grassy mounds.
Sudden come rushing in tumultuous dance
The wild bacchantes, mad with fiery joy,
And quivering with voluptuous melody;
They stir the dancing nymphs and lovers fair
To join them in their frenzied whirl of love,
While soft the sirens sing a serenade:

"O COME to the strand
Of the lake of delight!
O come to the land
Of beauty most bright!
Where the sweetest of kisses,
And soft arms caressing,
Shall enfold you with blisses,
Love's rapture confessing!"

A fleeting moment all the dancers pause
To listen to the sirens' passioned song—
With many repetitions and sweet strains—
The fervent invitation to these bowers
Where music is the soul and atmosphere,
And flowers breathe their heavy rich perfume,
And love is evermore the only queen.
Then visions seem to float upon the air:—
Fair Europa upon her snow-white bull,
Festooned with flowers and riding through the sea,
Led on by nereids and tritons bold;
Then beauteous Leda throned on rosy mists,
Soft moonlight and a shore of forest lake.
A swan swims toward her and caressingly
Hides his fond head upon her bosom fair.

Still other visions of the old-time love
Appear and disappear as music throbs.
Then as the sirens cease, the dance begins
Once more with wilder energy of joy
And stranger, fiercer music arabesque,
Until the wild bacchantes, fever-hot,
Have fired the ardent souls of all the throng
To fiercest frenzy of the maddest love.
Full at the height a sudden blight is felt
Of awful weariness, and all is still.
The lovers rest again upon the sward;
The wild bacchantes quickly disappear;
A thick mist gathers in great rosy clouds,
Concealing naiads, sirens, lovers, nymphs,
And leaving visible one only pair,—
Two glorious lovers, splendid to behold:
One the fair radiant Queen of Love herself,
The goddess Venus, perfect in her charms,
Features and form superbly beautiful,
Lying in rest upon a royal couch.
And at her feet, as lover, suppliant, slave,
Kneeling enraptured in devoted vows,
Tannhäuser, valiant knight of German lands,
And famous minstrel, singer of brave songs,
Poet and prince of poets in all lands.
For in an evil hour, when sad of heart
And full of earthly griefs and desperate pain,
A sudden madness seemed to strike his brain
And he had sought for refuge in the mount
Of Horselberg, and wandered to the depths,
Led captive in the lure of evil love.

A year of maddest revelry had passed
(It seemed to him as but a single day),

And now the life of sin palled on his heart.
O sad satiety of evil love,—
For sin can never satisfy the soul!
Now had his better nature waked again,
And longed for earthly life and liberty,
For earthly life with mingled joy and pain.

Sudden he wildly raised his aching head,
As if he started from a weary dream;
But Venus drew him back most lovingly.
Again he started and upraised his hands
Across his eyes, as if he dreamed a dream,
And would recall it to his half-waked brain.
But Venus softly whispered words of love:
"My dearest, speak; where stray thy thoughts to-day?"
He answered not, but cried in desperate pain:
"No more! no more! O that I now might wake!"
Then Venus: "Speak! what grief is in thy heart?"
Then he essayed to bare his troubled soul:
"In dreams I seemed to hear the distant sounds
That have so long been strangers to my ears,—
The silver chime of church-bells in the hills.
Tell me, I pray, how long since these I heard?"

Stung by his words, she spake in quick reproof:
"Art thou beside thyself? What aileth thee?"
And in pathetic maze he answered her:
"How long my sojourn here I cannot tell;
I cannot measure it by days or months;
The seasons pass, but I am unaware;

For now the radiant sun I see no more,
And nevermore the friendly stars of heaven;
No more the verdure of the gentle spring,
Nor fresh green foliage of the summer days;
No more hear I the nightingale's sweet song
That brings the promise of the earth renewed:
These sights, these sounds, fair nature and sweet earth,
Are these delights forever lost to me?"

Full of reproaches, sternly Venus spake:
"What! dost thou waver? Why these vain regrets?
Art thou so soon grown weary of the bliss
With which my love divine has compassed thee?
Or dost thou now so soon repent the crown
Of godhood that my love set on thy brow,
Giving thee place with the immortal great?
Hast thou so soon forgot thy bitter woes,
Which only by my love were soothed and cured?
Come, my own minstrel, seize thy harp divine!
Sing now of Love, which thou didst praise so well,
Chanting its bliss and rapture in such tones
That thou didst win me, goddess of all Love
And goddess of all Beauty. Sing to me!
Sing Love,—for see,—its highest prize is thine!
For I am thine. Fair Venus is thine own!"

Then suddenly inspired by her great love,—
Love that had been delight and deep despair,—

And thralled by her great beauty's mystic spell,
Tannhäuser seized his golden harp and sang
A rapturous song to Venus, Queen of Love:

"O QUEEN of Love! Immortal fame attend thee,
Most joyful praise to thee be ever sung!
Each dear delight which thy fair grace did lend me,
Shall wake the harp while time and love are young!
'T was joy alone, a longing deep for pleasure,
That filled my heart and darkened my desire,
And thou, whose bounty gods alone can measure,
Didst give to me love's own immortal fire!

"Yet am I only mortal, and the dower
Of thy great love grows heavier every hour.
Only a god can bear such boundless joy;
Unceasing bliss these mortal hearts destroy.
Give me, I pray, the earthly pain and pleasure
Of wholesome Nature's sweet alternate measure!
O Queen belov'd, I must away or die!
O Venus, fairest Goddess, let me fly!"

A flush of shame glowed on her angry face,
As rudely wakened from her dream of love,
Fair Venus spake: "Is this thy fealty?
And this thy song, so weary with regret?
Ah, where are now the rapturous measures glad,—
The joy of love which erst inspired thy heart?

Tell me, what has my love denied to thee?
Tell me, what have I done to weary thee?"

Then once again Tannhäuser took his harp,
A glowing penitence within his heart,
A fervent gratitude for all her love,
And sang with swelling voice this wondrous song:

"O QUEEN of Love! in numbers sweet I praise thee!
Thrice blessèd he on whom thy favors shine!
With grace of beauty every charm arrays thee,
And in thy soft white arms is bliss divine!
Transporting are thy wonders without measure,
The magic of all pleasure breathe I here,
No land of all the earth can boast such treasure;
Their wealth, beside thy riches, seems most drear.

"Yet in the pleasures of these rosy bowers
I long to see the woods and common flowers;
I long to see the heaven's crystal blue,
And the fair fields and verdure wet with dew;
I long to hear the song-birds in the dells,
And the dear chiming of the silver bells.
O Queen of Love, I must away or die!
O Venus, fairest Goddess, let me fly!"

Thus sang he praises of voluptuous love,
While in his heart was lassitude and pain;
And as he ceased, and pleaded to be gone,
Fair Venus sprang up from her couch and cried:

"Ungrateful wretch, to speak such scoffing words,
And scorn the wealth of love I poured on thee!
Thou praisest what thou seekest now to flee!
Alas, that all my charms have wearied thee!"

But quietly Tannhäuser answered her:
"O fair perfection, frown not on thy slave!
Thine overwhelming charms now must I shun,—
Thy wealth of love I cannot more endure!"
Quickly cried Venus with indignant breath:
"Beware, thou traitor! false dissembler, hold!
Thou shalt not leave me. I forbid thy flight!"
But firm he answered in a voice of pain:
"Yea, never was my love more strong, more true,
And yet, I must forever flee from thee!
Bereft of thy sweet presence, joy is hate,
Yet fate impels, — I long for liberty!"

And at that word, fair Venus turned away,
Buried her tear-stained face within her hands,
And long sat silent. Then again she turned,
Tears in her eyes, but love upon her lips,
In smiles and words of winning tenderness:
"Beloved, come! Renew our vows of love!
Remember all the rapture of the past!
See this fair grotto, sacred to our bliss!
The purple shadows break in softest dawn;
The murmurous music sounds the joys of love;
The perfumed air is full of fairest dreams.
Love hath a solace for thy restless heart,
Love hath delights as yet unknown to thee.

Come, let us now confess our faith renewed,—
Enter again into the bliss divine.
'Twere worse than dying from sweet love to part.
Come, plight anew our tender troth of love!
In joy immortal be our hearts at peace.
No longer worship the fair power of love,—
Come, be with me Love's Lord for evermore!"

Deep was he moved, and quickly snatched his harp,
To make melodious vows of loyalty.
Firm had he fixed his purpose to be gone,
Yet sought release by solemn promises
To make her beauty known to all the world.
Thus did he hope to soothe her wounded heart,
And sang his farewell song of praise to her:

"O QUEEN of Love, my harp shall ever praise thee!
While I have life, thou shalt my song inspire!
Thou fount of beauty, every charm obeys thee,
Of all that lives thou art the best desire!
The fire that thou dost kindle in my spirit
Shall burn, an altar flame, to thee alone!
My song shall be divine but by thy merit,—
For both my heart and harp thy love doth own!

"And yet for earth and earthly pain still yearning,
In thy soft chains with weakest shame e'er burning,
'T is dauntless liberty for which I sigh!

For deathless freedom I can all defy!
To this world's strife and glory I must go, —
Come life or death, come joy or bitterest woe!
O Queen of Love, I must away or die!
O Venus, fairest Goddess, let me fly!"

Thus had he sung three times this hymn of praise,
Extolling Venus and her radiant charms,
And all the rare enchantments of her realm;
Vowing to sing these praises evermore;
And yet each time he sang his heart was torn,
Longing for nature and the radiant spring,
Yearning for flowery fields and verdant woods,
Haunted by dreams of purity and peace.

Quickly she saw her plea with him was lost;
She saw him steeled against her blandishments;
She felt the bitter hate of woman scorned,
And in a burst of furious passion cried:
"Begone, thou shameless traitor heart, begone!
Madman, begone! I will not hold thee more!
I set thee free! Begone, I say, begone!
What thou art longing for shall be thy doom!
Go back to all the cold and joyless earth,
Where neither life nor love can fully bloom;
Whence every smiling god of joy hath fled;
Where dark suspicion has its evil birth!
Begone, thou madman, seek thy empty joy
In thy cold world and find it nevermore!
Soon will this pride and fever quit thy soul.

I see thee, humbled, coming back to me, —
Bruised, yea, and crushed, remorse deep in thy heart,
Remembering the joys that thou hast lost!
I see thee, seeking me with cries and tears,
Beseeching for the magic of my might!"

Tannhäuser answered proudly with a boast:
"Ah, fair enchantress, take my last farewell!
Never again shall I return to thee!"
Then Venus spake with a quick look of scorn:
"Yea, if thou never shalt return to me,
And if thou ever dost forget my love,
Then do I put my curse on all thy race, —
On all the false and faithless sons of men.
Then shall they seek for love, but all in vain, —
The world a desert and its lord a slave!
Go forth, thou madman, seek thy loveless doom!
Thou wilt return again and seek my love!"
Quickly he answered her with earnest speech:
"Nay, never shall I be thy slave again!
Nor know again the rapturous bliss of love!"
Then Venus: "Go! a wanderer on the earth,
Until thy heart shall draw thee back again!"
But he: "I go forever when I go!
Yea, my belovèd, though it break my heart."

Then Venus once again: "The world will scoff
And scorn thee, when it learns thy secret sin
And all this year of dalliance with me."
But he: "No more to joy and bliss I go, —
My longing calls to combat, yea, to death!
I go to sorrow and to direst pain.

Through penance shall I lose the hated curse,—
A true repentance heals the sorest heart."
Then Venus spake again: "Forgiveness ne'er
Can be thy portion with thy blackened soul!
Never will mercy ope its gates to thee!
Thou wilt return to me. No hope for thee,
Nor peace in all the world, except with me."

But with a cry Tannhäuser answered her:
"Goddess of pleasure, not in thee my trust—
My hope, my peace, doth rest in Mary's grace.
Mary, fair Queen of Heaven, virgin Queen,
To thee I cry for help! O rescue me!"

And with that prayer, and at that magic name
Of holy Mary, mother of all grace,
A miracle was wrought,—a shriek was heard,
And Venus vanished, and her realm of love
Was overwhelmed in darkness and abyss.

Amazed and stunned, Tannhäuser lay in trance,
And knew not if he lived, or died, or slept.
At length he raised himself and looked around,—
What wondrous scene his wondering eyes beheld!
Here was the valley green and beautiful
That boyhood days had known and loved so well;
Again sweet sunshine, and the sky's clear blue.
There on the right, the towering Wartburg rose—
That rocky fortress on a rocky height,

That filled his soul with dreams of chivalry;
And on the left, seen through the opening vale,
The wooded ranges of the Horselberg.
He looked with deepest shudder as he thought
Of all that he had known in those deep woods,—
The hidden path, the dark depths, and the cave
Where he had spent his year of nameless sin.
Now was his thought transformed and comforted,
For just before him on the wooded path
That upward guided to the Wartburg heights,
His eye beheld the holy Virgin's shrine,
A wayside shrine for passing travellers' prayers;
And now he heard the sheep-bells tinkling soft;
And there on a high cliff, in careless joy,
A youthful shepherd sang the charms of spring,
Playing upon his pipe a rustic strain:

"HAIR Holda, goddess of the spring,
Steps forth from the mountains old;
She comes and all the brooklets sing,
And fled is winter's cold.
My heart is full of gladdest dreams;
The day dawns fresh and clear;
The golden sunshine o'er me streams;
And May, sweet May, is here!
Play, play, my pipe, your lightest lay,
For spring has come, and merry May!"

Scarce had the shepherd played his happy strain,
When other songs were heard far off and slow;
The shepherd stopped and listened, as they neared
And grew in clearness and in solemn power.
It was a band of pilgrims, ancient men,
Descending from the frowning Wartburg's heights,
Beginning pious pilgrimage to Rome;
And as they walked, they sang this solemn hymn:

"O LORD, the sinner's hope and plea,
We bend our sorrowing steps to Thee!
O Mary, Queen of Heaven, we pray,
Be gracious to our pilgrim way!

"Deep is the guilt within the breast,
Gone is the heavenly peace and rest,—
O that relief would come again!
Heavy the sorrow and the pain.

"Unto the holy shrine we go,—
Thrice blessèd they who pardon know,—
To seek the peace of God's own word,
By penitence before our Lord."

Slowly they sang and wended their slow way;
The shepherd lifted up his cap, and waved
A greeting and farewell, and called to them:
"God speed you on your blessèd pilgrim way!
And breathe a prayer for me at holy Rome."

Spellbound, Tannhäuser seemed to stand;
New thoughts and hopes were surging in his breast;
Then suddenly he knelt in prayer and cried:
"Almighty God, all praise I give to Thee!
Great are the marvels of Thy wondrous grace!"

Slowly the pilgrims passed the mountain way,
Hard by the Virgin's shrine and through the woods;
And now were lost to sight. The sheep-bells clear
Far sounded, and the shepherd left the heights,
Playing soft ditties on his merry pipe.
Then fainter came the pilgrims' song once more:

"O Lord, the sinner's hope and plea,
We bend our sorrowing steps to Thee!
O Mary, Queen of Heaven, we pray,
Be gracious to our pilgrim way!"

Absorbed in fervent prayer Tannhäuser knelt,
And with the far-off song, his own heart sang:

"Deep is the guilt within my breast,
Gone is the heavenly peace and rest,—
O that relief might come again!
Heavy the sorrow and the pain!"

Tears choked his voice; he bowed his sorrowing head,
And wept most bitterly. The pilgrims' song
Had died in distance, and another sound,
Blest with the memories of childhood days,

Came to his ears,—the mellow church-bells' chime,
Calling the worshippers to holy prayer;
And once again the fountain of his tears
Welled up with new-born hopes and new-felt prayers.

Sudden the startling blast of hunting-horns
Rang through the hills and valleys, echoing,
And from the forest and the neighboring hills,
In quick and hot pursuit of hurrying game,
Rushed down a throng of huntsmen, brave arrayed
In all their hunting-trappings gay and bright,—
The Landgrave of Thuringia, and all
His brilliant court of minstrels and of knights.
But seeing there a figure motionless,
The Landgrave stopped amazed and low inquired:
"Who is yon penitent so deep in prayer?"
Then Walter, gayest knight of all the train,
Made answer: "Prayers and pilgrims close agree."
But Biterolf, another knight, spake up:
"By every sign he seems a noble knight."
While still another huntsman, Wolfram, cried,
For his keen eyes had recognized a friend:
"'Tis he whom we have lost for full a year,—
'Tis he whom we have mourned with sorrowing hearts!"
And all cried out with joy: "'Tis he! 'tis he!
Henry! our brave Tannhäuser! hail to thee!"

Amazed, Tannhäuser rose in haste and stood
In silence, — for deep guilt was in his heart.
He looked upon their faces, and was sad.

Then said the Landgrave: "Art thou surely come?
Dost thou return to our poor company
Which once so proudly, rashly, thou didst leave?"
And Biterolf, remembering old days:
"Pray tell us what thy coming means to-day, —
Shall it be peace, or means it war renewed?"
"Yea," added Walter, "art thou friend or foe?"
And others cried: "What, may he come as foe?"
But Wolfram, largest, freest heart of all,
Cried out in generous welcome and good cheer:
"O speak not such harsh words! Look at his face!
No trace of scorn and hate can there be seen!
We welcome thee, great minstrel and brave knight!
Alas, too long hast thou been lost to us!"
Then after him spake Walter, kindlier now:
"Yea, welcome, if thou comest here in peace."
And Biterolf: "Yea, welcome, if a friend."
And all: "All hail! all hail. We welcome thee!"

The Landgrave spake again: "Accept our word, —
We give thee hearty welcome! And we pray
That thou wilt tell us thy adventurous course:

Where thou hast tarried all these weary months,
What thou hast done to make thy heart so sad."
Then answered slow the errant minstrel knight:
"In strange and distant realms I wandered far,
But never found I joy, or rest of heart.
Ask me no further. No more would I strive.
Friendly I come. Let me as friend depart."

"Nay, thou shalt not depart," the Landgrave spake,
"For once again thou hast become our own!"
And Walter urged: "I say, thou must not go!"
And Biterolf: "We will not let thee go!"

Then said Tannhäuser, bitterly and slow,
A desperate sadness in his weary eyes:
"Let me depart! I cannot tarry here!
Nowhere on earth is rest for me again!
Forward I drive in doom my weary way!
The past I must forget for evermore!"
But all the knights exclaimed as with one voice:
"O, stay with us! forget the dreary past!
Here in thy home and friends thou shalt find rest!
What dost thou seek with vain and weary search?
Abide with us! We cannot say farewell!"

But though their words were generous and kind,
Naught could persuade him to remain and rest.
Sadly he shook his head, and turned to go.
Then Wolfram intercepted him and cried,
In a loud voice, and gazing in his face:
"Listen! one word! Stay for Elizabeth!"

And at that word, Tannhäuser stopped, his face
Stirred with a deep emotion as he spake:
"Elizabeth! O blessed love of Heaven!
And do I hear that sweetest name again?"
And Wolfram answered: "Yea, no foe is he
Who dares recall to thee that blessèd name!
And may I be permitted, gracious lord,
To tell him of the splendid prize he won?"
Thereat the Landgrave answered graciously:
"Yea, tell him of the marvel that he wrought
In that last famous tournament of song
Before we lost him, and God keep him true
That worthily he may explain his fate."

All eager, Wolfram told the wondrous tale:
"When thou in art of song last strove with us,
Thy conquering strain was master in the strife,
Forwhile our songs gained some smallvictory,
One glorious prize was won alone by thee.
Pray, was it magic, or some power divine,
That wrought through thee such wondrous miracle?
Thy song, so full of mystic joy and woe,
Enthralled the perfect flower of royal maids;

For after thou in scorn, alas, hadst gone,
Closed was her heart to all our brightest lays.
We saw a sorrow on her pallid cheek;
Of thee bereft, she wearied of our songs.
O noble minstrel, come and sing anew!
Awake once more thy strain of joyous love!
Cast off the burden of thy cares and fears!
And her fair star shall brightly shine again!"

And many knights joined in with eager voice:
"Yea, Henry, stay with us! Come back again!
We will forget all anger and all strife;
Our strains in harmony shall rise and soar;
For brothers shall we be for evermore!"

Touched by the love so freely given again,
Despite his absence and his lame excuse,
Tannhäuser threw himself in Wolfram's arms
And long embraced him as a faithful friend,
Greeted the other minstrels each in turn,
And bowed before the Landgrave gratefully.
Then with a longing, eager heart he cried:
"Elizabeth! O, guide my steps to her!
O radiant world that I had seemed to lose,
Thou smilest once again upon my heart!
O sun of heaven, hid with stormy clouds,
Again thou shinest on my path of hope!
O beauteous spring, thy thousand carols sweet
Are singing in my soul so jubilant!
O heart, my heart, in new unwonted bliss
Thou art rejoicing! Blest Elizabeth!"

E'en while he spake came many hunters more,
The Landgrave's whole vast retinue and train,
Until the valley thronged with hunting-men,

Horses and falcon-bearers, hounds and horns.
Eager the men came at the Landgrave's call,
And shouted seeing Tannhäuser again,—
Shouted with joy to learn that he would stay,
And grace the court again with song and sword.
The Landgrave blew a blast upon his horn,
And all the hunters wound their horns and blew;
The loud-mouthed bugle called, the baying hounds
Made answer, eager, deep and fiercely strong.
The minstrels flung themselves upon their steeds,—
For Tannhäuser a white steed, prancing proud;
Joyful the whole procession galloped on,
Ascending to the Wartburg's wooded heights,
Where dwelt the princess, fair Elizabeth,
Beloved of all, to Tannhäuser thrice dear.
And as they galloped gaily on they sang,
Minstrels and hunters joining in the strain:

"HURRAH! rejoice! he comes again!
The lost is found! his sorrow past!
Praise to the love that heals his pain!
Praise to the might that holds him fast!

"Awake our harps and sing a song!
The noblest and the highest dare!
Praise to the hero great and strong!
Praise to the fairest of the fair!"

TANNHÄUSER. PART II

THE TOURNAMENT OF SONG

RIM is the towered castle on the heights,—
The ancient Wartburg, immemorial
In noble deeds of splendid chivalry;
Its towers have held embattled armies off;
Its bastions have turned back full many a siege;
Its dungeons held full many a tragedy.
And here within the lordly castle walls
The famous Hall of Minstrels, lofty built
With groined and fretted ceiling, quaintly wrought,
And many mullioned windows where the glass
Shines bravely with the painted deeds of old.
And here, where these broad windows open wide,
Is seen the shaded fountained court within,
While far beyond, the smiling valley lies,
And still beyond, the mountains, range on range.
But why wears now the hall this festive air,—
These wreaths of flowers and long festoons of green?
Perchance some special day of thanks or praise;
Perchance some merry dance or festival;
Perchance some knightly deeds are done to-day;
Perchance some heroes strive with sword or song.

Now as we look and listen, one draws near,
Most fair of face, most winsome in her grace,—

Her dark hair like a lustrous crown of night,
Her kind gray eyes pure, patient and all wise,
Yet full of laughter and of hidden fire;
Her coronet of shining gold and pearls,
Her simple gown of soft cloth like the snow,
Her neck enwreathed with lustrous strings of pearl,
Her girdle rich with gold and glittering gems,
Her flowing cloak, soft azure, starred with gold.
It is the Landgrave's niece, Elizabeth,
A niece and yet a daughter unto him,—
The fairest, sweetest princess at his court,
And best-belov'd, and noblest of them all.

Most joyful came she to the Minstrels' Hall,—
The rosy morning light within her eyes;
For he was near, the dear choice of her heart,
And life was new and radiant again.
And now she spake what her fond heart would say:
"Dear hall of song, I greet thee with my love!
I greet thee with all joy, thou hallowed place!
'T was here he sang that wondrous song of love
That lifted me from darksome dreams to heaven.
But ah! how soon the dream was changed again:
This Minstrel Hall became a desert drear.
When he went forth, all joy went forth with him;
And with him fled my heart's deep wealth of peace.

But now once more my bosom heaves with bliss,
And thou, dear Minstrel Hall, art bright again,
For he who lights both thee and me with joy
No longer roams afar in unknown lands.
These vaults shall ring again with glorious song!
He comes whose strains bring rapture to my soul!"

Scarce had she spoken, when two minstrels came, –
Tannhäuser, led by Wolfram's loyal hand.
Upon the threshold paused they, as they saw
The fair sweet vision of the princess there.
Then Wolfram whispered: "See, – Elizabeth!
Draw near and greet her! None shall interrupt!"
And near the door he stood, as sentinel,
While forward rushed Tannhäuser in all haste,
And threw himself impetuously down
Before Elizabeth, and faintly cried:
"O Princess!" and could speak no further word.

While she, confused by all this sudden cry
And sudden show of feeling from the knight
Whom long she cherished in her secret heart,
Spake quickly: "Nay, thou must not kneel to me,
Nor dare I meet thee thus! I must away!"
And she would go. But still he pleaded sore:
"Nay, dare to stay. I pray thee, do not go!
O, let me kneel forever at thy feet!"

Then to his prayers Elizabeth gave heed,
And kindly turning toward him, gently said:
"I pray thee, rise. 'T is not for thee to kneel
Here in this hall which crowned thy triumphs oft;
Rise, I implore! I give best thanks to Heaven
That thou hast come again to stay with us.
Where hast thou tarried all this weary time?"

And rising slow, Tannhäuser soft replied:
"Far, far away in strange and distant lands;
But o'er it all, oblivion has come.
Between to-day and yesterday a veil
Which blots out all remembrance of the past,
Save one thing only in my constant thought—
The awful bitterness and dark despair
Lest I might never hope to greet thee more,
Nor see thy fair face with my weary eyes."

Gently she asked, all kindness in her voice:
"What was it, then, that led thee back to us?"
And he replied: "A miracle it was,
Strange, inconceivable, by Heaven wrought!"
And stirred to deep emotions by his word,
She spake again her secret inner thought,
Revealing with all innocence and grace
The fondest hopes of her pure virgin heart:
"Praise God for this dear miracle of grace!
I say it from my heart's profoundest depths....
Forgive me! Scarce I know what I have said;
In dreams I seem, and foolish as a child;
Thy presence is such gladness to my soul,
Such vision strange of life, mysterious, high.

The world to me is changed. What can it mean,
This riddle, this emotion of my heart?
Always I loved the merry minstrels' songs,
And listened with delight so oft and long;
Always their stirring songs and noble praise
Held for my soul a fascinating spell;
Yet I confess, that wondrous song of thine
Has wakened in my heart a strange new life;
Repose and joy have seemed to fly from me;
And there have come the bitterest pangs and bliss,
Emotions which I cannot comprehend,
And longings which I never knew before.
What once to me was lovely now is changed,
And fled are all my former dear delights.
Yea, when thou hadst departed from our midst,
My peace was gone, and longing went with thee.
No more the minstrels woke my heart to joy;
Their finest lays seemed sad and strange and dead;
In slumber's dreams my heart was full of pain;
In waking hours a train of woeful thoughts.
All gladness had departed from my life,—
O Henry, tell! Why am I thus enthralled?"

Tannhäuser, in all rapture, quick rejoined:
"Yea, God be praised for all his loving grace!
Love touched my heart with magic melody;
Love spake to thee through all the wondrous song!
'Twas love that led me captive to thy feet!

O blessed hour in which our hearts do meet!
O blessed power of love that fills our lives!
At last I give thee greeting from my soul,
And gladly vow to leave thee nevermore!
Now shall my life awake renewed and strong;
Now shall new peace and hope rise in my breast;
Now shall the clouds of sorrow break and pass,—
For glorious the sun of love doth shine!"
And Wolfram, hearing all this rapturous word,
And fair Elizabeth confessing love,
Spake to his heart, for he had also loved:
"So flies my last fond hope of winning her!
So fades my dream. Yet may their life be blest!"

A moment stood the lovers in farewell,
Looking with rapture in each other's eyes,
And touching hands that trembled in delight.
Lifting her hand, he kissed it with an awe
That he should dare to touch so pure a thing, —
Then turned and left her. Straight to Wolfram turned,
And held him to his heart in gratitude, —
Not dreaming of the pain in Wolfram's heart,
Or of the sacrifice of friend for friend.
Together from the hall they quickly went,
Tannhäuser looking back and waving oft
To her who watched him from the balcony,
His dear Elizabeth, his new life's hope!

Soon were more footsteps heard, and presently
The Landgrave came to meet his loving niece,

And welcome there the throngs of happy guests
Who soon would come to grace the war of song.
Elizabeth ran to him as he came,
And hid her blushing face upon his breast.
Then spake he, in a kindly bantering way:
"Most gladly do I find thee in this hall
Which thou hast shunned these many months. And pray,
What lured thee now from thy long solitude
To come and grace our feast of song to-day?"
And clinging to him, softly answered she:
"My sovereign uncle, father, yea, my all!"
Still smiling, and most kindly then he spake:
"Come, open now thy secret heart to me."
But looking up, most sweetly came her words:
"Gaze in my eyes and read. I cannot speak."

Then looked he earnestly, and saw love's light
Deep in the wonder of her tender eyes,
And answered: "Yea, unspoken let it be,
This loving secret of thy holiest life.
Let all its magic sweetness be untold,
Till thou thyself shalt bid it to unclose.
So shall it be. The wondrous flame of song
To-day shall soar to heights unknown before, —
Thy presence shall give life and crown to all.
The glorious art shall match the glorious deed.
To-day our nobles will assemble here, —
Already they approach to grace the feast.
None will be absent, for they all have heard
That thy fair hand will give the victor's wreath.

Yea, some may hope for thy fair hand itself,—
The loveliest prize that this wide world could give."

And as they spoke, the trumpets sounded forth
The near beginning of the tournament.
The Landgrave and the fair Elizabeth,
Under a gorgeous canopy of state,
And high upon a dais brave arranged,
Waited the coming of the happy guests.
Four pages made announcement of the names,
While counts and ladies, knights and retinues,
Each noble holding his fair lady's hand,
Were welcomed by the Landgrave and his niece
With gracious greetings and a smiling joy.
And in response of greeting sang the knights:

"HAIL, noble hall, where song the heart rejoices,
May lays of peace within thee never fail!
Long may we cry with glad and loyal voices:
Thuringia's Prince, great Landgrave Hermann, hail!"

Then the assembly took the seats assigned,
Forming a large half circle, brilliant, gay
With beauty, valor, gladness and renown;
Gorgeous the men's gay garments and bright plumes,
And fair the ladies, with their flowery gowns,
And golden circlets round their radiant brows,
And flowing veils of airy waving length.
And soon the minstrels entered walking slow,
With dignity and glory in their steps;

Each brow encircled with a laurel wreath,—
Except Tannhäuser's, for his wreath was lost
By forfeiture of absence from the court.
Right gaily were they clad in garb of song;
Each minstrel bore his silver-stringèd harp,
While gleaming sword hung fiercely at each side;
Stately they bowed to the assembled guests,
And took their places as the pages led.

These were the minstrels,—each a man of fame:
Wolfram von Eschenbach, a churchly soul;
And Biterolf, an honest old gray wolf;
And Walter, von der Vogelweide called;
Heinrich der Schreiber, poet of renown;
Reinmar von Zweter, scholar, minstrel, knight;
But Tannhäuser, the last to grace the hall,
Was greatest of them all in gifts and grace,
Noble in bearing, every inch a prince,
A glorious noble and a valiant knight.

Rising, the Landgrave spake these gracious words:
"Welcome, brave knights and minstrels, to these halls,
Where oft and nobly have ye sung of yore
In wisdom veiled, perchance in mirthful vein,
Yet ever gladdened every listening heart.
Ye knights have fought with swords,—now fight with songs.
Yea, tho' your swords were loosed in bloody fray,

Drawn to uphold the German fatherland,
When with our southern foe we fought and won,
And for our country braved the heroes' death,
Yet to the harp be equal meed of praise;
For with the harp and voice ye nobly fight
For truth and honor and the happy home,
For virtue and for pure and noble faith, —
And gain for these most gracious victory!
Ye come to-day for festival of song,
And I would make it festival of joy;
For here to-day our gallant minstrel comes
Whom for so long and woefully we missed.
We welcome him, although his blest return
In some mysterious darkness still is wrapped, —
Perchance the magic power of song will tell.
Therefore hear now the theme I set for you:
The theme is Love, its nature and its ways:
How may we know it? what are its sure signs?
And know ye, — for I say it solemnly, —
He who most wisely and most worthily
Sings thus of Love, most lofty and most true,
To him the Princess shall award the prize.
He may demand the fairest guerdon known, —
I vouch that what he asks shall granted be.
Up then, ye gallant minstrels! Tune your harps
And sing the praise of Love. Great is the prize,
And ere the start, let all receive our thanks!"

Then cried the knights and all the throng of guests:
"Hail! yea, thrice hail! Lord of Thuringia!
Hail! patron of the noble art of song!"

The Tournament of Song

Then all were seated, and four pages came
Up-gathering in a golden cup the names
Of all the minstrels. With a lowly bow
They handed it to fair Elizabeth,
Who stood as priestess of the sacred lots.
She put her fairy fingers in the cup,
And drew therefrom the fateful written slip
Whereon was writ his name who first should sing
In this fair tournament of royal song.
Quickly the waiting pages took the slip,
Advanced with ceremony to the midst,
And read the name to all the company:
"Wolfram von Eschenbach begins the song!"

Then at the Landgrave's feet the pages sat,
While fair Elizabeth, a radiant queen,
Filled all the room with subtle sheen of light,
So wondrous was her gentle beauty's power,
So glorious the sweetness of her face.
Apart Tannhäuser sat as if entranced,
And leaned in solemn thought upon his harp.
Brave Wolfram rose, full of a joy divine
That he was called to sing the praise of love.
His eyes shone brightly as he tuned his harp;
His noble face revealed his noble heart.
Softly and sweet his happy song began:

"BRAVE knights and ladies, ye delight mine eyes!
Such fair assemblies grace no other land;
Such gallant heroes, valiant, noble, wise,—
They seem a stately forest, strong and grand.

"And blooming in this forest, wondrous, sweet,
These dames and maidens are the flowers fair.
Such nobleness and beauty here doth meet,
My song is mute before the vision rare.

"Then I look upward and behold one star
That shines above the forest, clear in heaven;
It gathers tender radiance from afar,
And to my heart one holy prayer is given.

"But lo! the forest's spring, life's spring, is Love,
From whose unfathomed depths all joy doth flow.
My spirit gazes deep, thanks God above,
And all my life feels new ethereal glow!

"Oh, never would I sully that pure spring
By vain desire, or dark impurity;
Kneeling, I worship thee, O Love! and sing,
And for thee only, will I live or die.

"Brave knights and ladies, thus I sing to you
What I have felt of love, love pure and true!"

His eye had rested on Elizabeth
When he had sung of her as star of love.
'T was human love he sang with fervent soul,
But love made glorious by its purity.
Applauding him, the knights and ladies cried:
"'T is true! 't is true! We praise thy noble song!"

Then Tannhäuser arose as from a dream,
And looked around defiant, fierce and wild.
Gazing a moment into far-off space,
A passionate delight shone on his face;
With trembling hands his harp-strings close he felt;
A strange unearthly smile upon his lips,
As if some magic music thralled his soul;
Nor knew he where he was, nor seemed to care
That fair Elizabeth was looking down
With doubt and wonder in her troubled face.
Then with a start, he loudly swept his harp,
And sang in strangest mood an answering song:

"O WOLFRAM, foolish is thy pallid song;
Ne'er hast thou tasted love or deepest bliss;
Thy timid heart and smooth and stammering tongue
Make life and love a dreary weariness.

"Thou singest Love, ethereal, dim and pure,—
A limpid spring, a far-off shining star!
Such bloodless love my heart cannot endure,—
Love is no limpid spring, nor star afar.

"Love is fair flesh in beauteous human form,
With laughing eyes and softest silken tresses,
With kisses, and a throbbing breast, and warm
Soft clinging arms for tenderest caresses.

"Love is no vision, far-off, chaste, divine, —
Love 's a hot heart that beats and throbs with mine!"

And at that interruption rude and wild, —
For yet Tannhäuser had no call to speak,
But broke the rules and blurted out his heart,
Full of a frenzy fierce and passionate,
Bringing a discord to all harmony, —
The people in a consternation rose,
And fair Elizabeth in wild amaze
Looked on the knight intoxicate with lust.
Then Biterolf, another minstrel knight,
Him answered, speaking in the fiercest wrath:

"WE challenge thee, for who could silent be
Enduring thy vile speech and insults free?
Thy pride hath reached its lowest ebb this day;
Thou shameless slanderer of Love, away!

"When holy Love inspires our heart to song,
New valor makes the heart and sword more strong;
Unshamed remains its spell most pure, most high,
And for its glory would I gladly die!

"For gracious womanhood and honor true,
Through fire and flood would I my way pursue!
But love's low pleasures and the joys of lust—
I scorn them worthless as the worthless dust."

Then knights and ladies cried in great applause:
"Bravo, brave Biterolf! We stand with thee!"
But fiercer grew Tannhäuser. Flashed his eyes
With angry passion and exultant joy,
And in a storm of wrath he answered wild:

"Avaunt, thou senseless babbler, Biterolf!
Thou canst not sing fair love, thou grim old wolf!
On thy rough heart its sweetness never gleamed, —
The bliss that I have known thou ne'er hast dreamed.

"Poor pallid soul, unfit for bliss or woe,
What rapture could thy thin blood ever know?
The gentle thrills of joy thy weak love brings
Are worthless as the song thy harp now sings!"

Stirred to a tumult, all the knights cried out:
"Let him not end. He is beside himself!
We will not hear his daring madness more!"
While Biterolf in anger drew his sword.
Then spake the Landgrave, quelling all the strife,
"Put back thy sword! Ye minstrels, keep the peace!
Go forward with our tournament of song!
Wolfram, sing now thy final song to Love!"

And Wolfram rose amid a stillness deep,
While with an upward glance for Heaven's smile,
He sang the closing of his noble song:

"HALLOW my song, O Heaven, with holy art,
For noblest Love it sings, for Love it strives;
Banished all sin and evil from our heart,
Let purity and honor fill our lives!

"O highest, holiest Love, I sing thy praise!
Immortal fire, God's glory in a kiss!
Upon thee, angel beautiful, I gaze;
Deep in my soul, I feel thy perfect bliss.

"Thou camest like a god from heaven down;
I follow thee most reverent and afar;
I see all joys and graces as thy crown;
O Love divine, in heaven the brightest star!"

Then once again Tannhäuser swept his harp,
Exalted into madness fierce and strong;
Invoked the memory of past delights,
And of the evil goddess of his heart;
And in the very melody and mood,
When he had sung to Venus his last song,
Broke out in blasts of stormy rhapsody
Of strangest frenzy, passionate and wild:

"O QUEEN of Love, immortal fame attend thee!
I sing thy praise, for I have known thy heart!
Gorgeous the beauty, which all grace doth lend thee!
Fount of all rapture, fiery Love thou art!
O burning bliss of rapture in thy kisses!
This, this is Love! All else is drear and cold.

Away, dull mortals, prating of love's blisses!
Draw near the hill of Venus and behold!"
. . . . . .

And as he uttered "Venus!" name accurst,
A cry of horror burst from every throat:
"Ah, desperate madman! let him quick be gone!
Hear his vile words! He hath with Venus been!
Away his loathèd presence from our sight!"

In dire dismay the ladies rose and ran,
Shrinking away from this attainted wretch;
A nameless terror thrilled them through and through;
They crowded from the hall in frantic haste.
Tannhäuser hurled his harp upon the floor,
With crashing stroke that cried out like a shriek.
Each minstrel's sword leaped from its angry sheath;
It seemed as if a thunderclap had struck
The dreadful day of discord and of doom.
Elizabeth in horror turned away,
Yet stood in fresh anxiety and fear,
Her soul athrob in agony of tears. . . .
It was an awful moment, great with fate,
Wrath, clamor, shouting, and a horror deep.

Quickly the minstrels left their seats, and now
Had gathered round the Landgrave and the knights;
Distress and wrath upon their faces glowered
As fierce they looked at Tannhäuser, who stood
Defiant and alone, with passion mad.

Then cried the knights for desperate revenge:
"The dark avowal of his shame ye hear!
His own lips insolent confess his guilt!
He hath been partner in the lust of hell,
And paramour of Venus in vile love!
Abominable! shameless! thrice-accurst!
These swords shall drink thy worthless traitor-blood!
Go back in shame to hell's most loathsome pit,
And be anathema for evermore!"

They pressed Tannhäuser with their glittering swords,
And in a moment would have slain him there,
As shameless traitor to his sacred vows,
Had not Elizabeth rushed quick between,
And saved the victim from the fierce assault
With the loud cry: "Stay ye! hold back your swords!"

And as they halted in a wondering maze,
The Landgrave spake, reproof was in his voice:
"Elizabeth! What foolish deed is this, —
Thou chastest maiden shielding such vile sin?"
But still she stood her ground and answered them,
Hiding Tannhäuser's body with her own:
"Stand back! or pierce this bosom with your swords!
Death and its terrors cannot crush me now,
For he hath struck me a far deadlier wound."

Again the Landgrave spake: "Elizabeth,
Scarce can I listen to thy gentle words.

How comes thy purest heart thus deep enthralled
To pity him so shameless and so vile?
Such base betrayer needs thy fiercest scorn!"
But still she shielded him and pleading spoke:
"Think not of me! For I would save his soul.
He must not be accurst eternally.
And now I ask you with my woman's heart,
Ye would not rob him of eternal hope?"

Then spake the Landgrave sternly with slow words:
"This madman casts away all hope of heaven,
And such as he can never be redeemed!
A sin like his thrusts him beyond the pale!
Upon him rests forever Heaven's curse!"

And once again they sought to take his life,
But she still held them off and loudly cried:
"Away from him! Ye cannot be his judge!
O be not cruel! Put aside your swords,
And listen to a spotless maiden's prayer!
Let Heaven declare through me its holy will!
The hapless mortal who hath been ensnared
By some mysterious maze and toil of sin, —
How dare you say he may not win again
Salvation through deep pain and penitence?
Ye who are such believers in God's truth,
Ye cannot now deny His highest word!
Speak, would you rob a sinner of his hope,
In His name, who was hope and mercy's self?
Behold me! how my tender heart is crushed.
Yon knight has struck my life with cruel blow,
For this true heart did love him faithfully,

And now is hurled to darkest depths of woe.
Yet do I pray for him. O spare his life!
Give him, I pray, the chance of penitence!
Renew in him a ray of faith and hope!
Tell him for sinners the dear Saviour died!"

And as she spake, Tannhäuser seemed to hear,
His frenzy left him; he grew calm again.
Then as his reason came, he wept in pain
And fell upon the floor in agony
With moans: "Woe, woe is me! Forever lost!"

After a space, the quiet came again,
For hearts were deeply touched by her appeal.
Then spake the Landgrave with a trembling voice:
"Methinks an angel from the highest heaven
Has come and brought us God's own holy word.
Behold, thou despicable, thou shameless one,
This noble maiden thou hast sinned against!
Thou gavest hurt to her, as cruel as death,
Yet prays she for thy worthless life and soul.
Who would not yield, hearing such angel prayer?
Dare I to hold the guilty unforgiven
When Heaven's message shows a door of hope?
Yea, thy dread crime forgiveness yet may find,
And in God's name, I bid thee live and hope!"

Still lying prone in sorrow and remorse,
Weeping, Tannhäuser uttered the deep prayer:
"An angel from God's heaven was sent to me
To save my sinful soul from lowest hell!
And O! with desperate insolence of sin
I dared to raise my lecherous eyes to her.

Elizabeth pleads for Tannhäuser

O Thou most merciful to human sin,
This angel comes from Thee to save my soul!
Have mercy on me, deep in sin I cry,
Give grace of Heaven to my dark despair!"

In agony, Tannhäuser rushed to them,
Imploring each to plunge the glittering sword
Into his heart, and end his misery.
But none would slay him after her fair prayer.
Into the midst the Landgrave gravely stepped,
And spake his sentence, hard but merciful:
"Ye see a deed most shameless come to light!
There stole among us, in a treacherous mask,
A foul and thrice-accursèd child of sin.
We now disown him, ban and banish him;
By him our threshold pure is stained with shame,
And harboring him too long, the wrath of Heaven
May justly strike if we deal light with sin.
Know, wretched one, to keep thee from thy doom,
One path alone can save thy guilty soul.
This path I show thee. Seek, and save thy soul!
To-day a band of pilgrim penitents
Have gathered from all parts of my domain.
The older ones already have set forth;
The younger rest them in the vale below.
'T is not for darkest crimes like thine they go,
But only common daily faults and sins;
Desire for heavenly grace is in their souls,
And so they seek the sacred shrine at Rome.
Go with these pilgrims to the holy place!
Kneel in the dust and there atone thy sin!

Bow unto him who holds the keys of heaven,
The sovereign Pontiff of the Church of God.
But come not back unless he shall forgive,
And thou canst bring the open sign of shrift.
Yea, we resign the vengeance in our heart,
Because this maiden like an angel prayed;
But shouldst thou loiter still in sin and shame, —
Beware! a sword shall find thy guilty heart!"

Then fair Elizabeth up-breathed this prayer:
"O God of grace, be merciful to him!
Though deep and dark his sin, forgive, I pray!
For him I do beseech, my whole life cries, —
Let him not sink in night, but see Thy light!
O God, to save his soul I give myself, —
In willing sacrifice I give Thee all!
Henceforth I hide me in the cloistered walls,
With nuns of God and sisters of the poor,
To mingle prayers to Thee with loving deeds
And plead forever for his guilty soul.
Take my whole life! I call it mine no more!"

Full bitterly Tannhäuser prayed again:
"O where shall I find mercy for my sin,
And how atone for this mine awful guilt?
All hope hath vanished from my sorrowing soul;
God's grace hath gone and left me deep despair.
Yet will I turn my steps in penitence,
And beat my breast in sorrow for my sin,
And kneel in dust before the throne of grace.
Accurst forever be my guilty lust!
O, that thou also might forgive my guilt,

Thou heavenly angel of my heart's last hope!
So cruelly and basely wronged by me,
Who yet can give thyself in sacrifice!"

Then as he knelt in heartfelt penitence
He heard again the early morning chant
Solemn, majestic in the twilight vale.
Full soon a band of pilgrims came in sight,
And fair Elizabeth with upraised hand
Pointed to them as to a happy sign.
Nearer they came, she heard the solemn words,
And bade him listen to their holy hymn:

"Unto the holy shrine we go,—
Thrice blessèd they who pardon know,—
To seek the peace of God's own word,
By penitence before their Lord."

Tannhäuser heard, and started suddenly,—
A ray of hope had lighted in his soul.
Down at the feet of dear Elizabeth
He threw himself in agony of tears,
Devoutly kissing her fair garment's hem;
Then rising up again, he broke away
To follow with the pilgrims, crying loud:
"To Rome! to Rome!"
And all call after him,
Landgrave and minstrels, knights and nobles all,
And fair Elizabeth with tearful eyes,
A prayer and hope uprising in their hearts:
"To Rome! to Rome! God grant him grace at Rome!"

TANNHÄUSER. PART III

THE POPE'S PARDON

HE sunset of a glorious autumn day
Flings out effulgence, purple and red gold;
The sky is an apocalypse of light,
The open portals of a radiant heaven.
There are the towers and pinnacles and domes
Of the celestial city of the clouds;
While far beyond gleam summits snowy-capped
Of silver mountains lustrous with the light,
And shining lakes of that immortal land
Of shimmering glory in the sunset skies.
Nearer at hand the massive rocky height
And strong-built castle of the Wartburg stand,
And to the left, that mount of heathen wiles,
That frowning dreariness, the Horselberg.

Here in the valley where the autumn leaves
Are thick with color stands the Virgin's shrine
For roadside worship, and before it now
A woman knelt in prayer. In sorrow deep
And sore distress, she wrung her hands and wept,
Clothed all in white, like some fair cloistered nun,
In penitential robe of purity,
With sorrows whitening even her white soul.

Lo! 'twas the fair Elizabeth who wept,
Heartsick for love betrayed and hope deferred.

And now another figure came in sight,
Descending from the wooded mountain heights
Along a path that led him to the shrine.

'T was that brave knight, Wolfram von Eschenbach;
Slowly he walked as if in heavy thought.

Sudden he saw the fair Elizabeth,
And stopped a moment, murmuring to himself:
"See where she kneels by yonder sacred shrine
In fervent prayer! Yea, often is she there.
For thus I see her, as I wind my way—
Sad way and lonely these dull, weary days—
Down the far valley from the wooded heights.
There prays she for the sinner, day and night,
Who struck a death-blow to her loving heart,
Bruising her life in passionate disdain.
For him she prays the mercy of high Heaven.
(O holy love, how wonderful thy grace!)
But soon the pilgrims will return from Rome:
'T is autumn and erelong they must be here.
Will he come back repentant and absolved?—
These are her questions, this her constant prayer.
Grant, O ye saints, that they may meet once more,
Although my wound may never heal again,
Yea, grant to her all comfort and all peace!"
And once again he started on his way,
When floating up the valley came a sound
Of happy pilgrims singing holy hymns.

Quickly Elizabeth before the shrine
Arose and listened, then cried out in joy:
"It is the pilgrims' song! They come again!
O holy saints, reveal my duty now,
That I may do it worthily and well!"

The final prayer of Elizabeth

While Wolfram spake, communing with himself:
"Yea, 't is the pilgrims and their solemn chant
That tells of sins absolved and pardon won.
O heavenly grace, make strong her loving heart,
For this the dreaded crisis of her life!"

Far off the pilgrims' song was sweetly heard;
Nearer they came, and clearer were the words;
The winding roads, thick-wooded, hid from view
The marching throng, as tunefully they raised
Their joyous voices full of cheer and peace;
Until they came in sight and reverent kneeled
Beside the wayside shrine, and sang this song:

"HAPPY we come to home and friends,
In these dear fields our journey ends;
Our pilgrim staves henceforth may rest!
For peace, deep peace, now fills our breast!

"The sinner's prayer on high was heard,
And answered by our gracious Lord;
The tears we poured before His shrine
Were turned to hope and joy divine!

"The saving grace washed out our sin;
The peace of God came flowing in;
All fear of death and hell is o'er, —
O praise the Lord for evermore!
Sing hallelujah o'er and o'er!
Sing hallelujah evermore!"

And still they sang their hymns as on they went,
Passed by the shrine, and farther down the vale;

The while Elizabeth scanned each glad face, —
Her heart a-tremble with her eager hope.
No face she knew. Deep piteous was her cry,
Kneeling once more before the Virgin's shrine:
"He cometh back no more, nay, nevermore!
O blessed Virgin, hear my fervent prayer!
To thee, beloved Helper, now I cry!
Here in the dust I bend before thy shrine!
O, now release me from this weary earth!
Grant that my virgin soul, made angel-pure,
May enter now thy holy kingdom's gates!
There may I utter truer prayers for him
Whose burden of deep guilt is on my heart!
If in vain hope I have been deep enthralled,
And turned my heart at all from thee away;
If in a thoughtless, foolish hour I held
An earthly longing cherished in my soul, —
Now have I struggled with the bitterest pains,
And slain desire within my secret heart!
Yet if thou shrive me not by welcome death,
O, grant me grace to bear my loveless fate,
For I in all humility to thee
Do vow to live a virgin all my days;
And evermore my prayer to thee shall rise
That heavenly grace may save him from his sins, —
Him whom I loved, and lost!"

Long time she knelt;
Then as she slowly rose, she saw Wolfram,
Who near approached to have a word with her.
She bade him by a gesture not to speak;
Too full and heavy are sad hearts for words;

And when at length after a silence long,
He asked: "Pray, may I walk the path with thee?"
She spake no word, but showed him by a look
That though she thanked him for his faithful love,
She never could accept it. Naught to her
Were things of earth henceforth. She lived for Heaven.
And as she upward looked with glance entranced,
He saw her meaning, and in reverence stood.
Slow and alone she wended her sad way
Along the mountain path to farther heights,
Until at last she disappeared from view
Within the frowning Wartburg's massive walls.

As long as he could see her, Wolfram watched
With tenderness and longing in his eyes;
Then taking up his harp, he played and sang
This fair romance of evening's holy star,
While twilight trembled into gathering night:

"THE dusk, like death, a gloomy darkness brings,
Enshrouds the valleys with her sombre wings;
The soul who follows to yon glorious height
Must leave behind all fear, and dare the night!
There shinest thou, O loveliest, tenderest star!
Thy softened light a blessing near and far!
With thy fair rays new faith and hope are given,
And from the vale of earth, thou leadest to heaven!

"O thou sublime, sweet evening star,
Joyous I greet thee from afar!
Whisper my love as she goes by,
From earth's green valleys to the sky!
My heart to that fair angel given,
Soon to be brightest star in heaven!

"O evening star, thy holy light
Gladly I welcome with the night!
And from my heart that hid its love
I send my prayers to her above!
God gave her for earth's fairest vision,
Soon rises she to heights Elysian!"

Now grew the night more dark. And in the gloom
Appeared a traveller, footsore and sad;
Pallid his face and drawn; his tattered dress
Perchance was once a pilgrim's solemn garb.
Helped by his staff, he walked with falt'ring steps.
Sudden he stopped and listened. Then he spake:
"I heard the sound of harp. How sad the strings!
Surely it was not she who played and sang."

From out the night and shadows Wolfram rose,
And asked the stranger courteously and fair:
"Who art thou, pilgrim, wandering so alone?"
Whereat the tattered traveller drew near,
And gazed intently at the minstrel-knight:
"And dost thou ask that question, Who am I?
Right well do I know thee. Wolfram thou art,
The 'clever minstrel!' called by loving friends."

Elizabeth bids farewell to Wolfram

Mocking he spake, and Wolfram quickly cried:
"What see mine eyes? Tannhäuser, is it thou?
What brings thee here dejected and distressed?
Speak, gloomy pilgrim! Not with sin unshrived,
Thou darest to set foot in our domain!"

The Pope's Pardon

But sadly spake Tannhäuser, — for 't was he:
"Nay, pious minstrel, put thy fears aside!
I seek not thee, nay, nor thy fellows proud.
A path I seek, or else a trusty guide,
To find a path that once I trod with ease."
And Wolfram asked: "What path is that you seek?"
To which Tannhäuser answered with a cry
That seemed to tell a frenzy of desire, —
The bitter longing of a desperate heart:
"The path to Venus in the Horselberg!"

Amazed and horror-stricken, Wolfram cried:
"O hapless wretch! Is this thy purpose vile?
Thy desperate words my very ears profane!"
Then asked Tannhäuser fiercely once again:
"Nay, but the path! Canst guide me to the path?"
"Madman!" cried Wolfram. "Horror's in thy words!
Whence comest thou? Didst thou not go to Rome?"

"Speak not of Rome!" Tannhäuser cried in rage.
Then Wolfram once again asked quietly:

"And didst thou seek no pardon for thy sin?
Didst thou not seek the holy shrine for shrift?"
"Nor speak of that!" Tannhäuser answered him.
Yet Wolfram still persisted: "Speak, I pray!
And tell me whether thou hast been to Rome?"
Then grimly Tannhäuser, in bitter pain:
"Yea, I have been to Rome,—God save the day!"
But Wolfram cried: "Speak on, unhappy man!
I hear thy words with deepest sympathy."

"With sympathy?" the other in amaze,—
"What sayest thou? Then thou art not my foe?"
And Wolfram: "Nay, thy foe I never was!
I only sought to keep thee firm and true.
But speak! How fared thy pilgrimage?"
His eye
Alone responding to the generous love,
Slowly Tannhäuser spake: "Yea, Wolfram, hark!
And thou shalt hear all that befell at Rome!
Nay, come not close to me! Where'er I am
Is deep accurst! Stand off, but mark me well!
More penitent in soul than ever pilgrim went
On earth before, I sought my way to Rome.
An angel had dispelled the pride of sin,
The mad profaneness, from my guilty breast;
For her dear sake I took the sorrowing path
To pray for pardon and for earthly peace;
For her whose sweet tears pleaded still for me,
And sad bewailed my heavy grievous sin.

Yea, as I saw the pilgrims laden sore,
Me-seemed their burdens still were far too light;
And when their feet oft sought the easy path,
I trod unshod amid the rock and thorn;
When they refreshed their lips by some cool stream,
Thirsty I plodded on beneath the sun;
When they besought the aid of holy saints,
I shed my life-blood for the cause divine;
When in some hospice they sought sheltered rest,
I stretched my limbs amid the snow and ice;
Lest Italy's fair scenes should give me joy,
Blindfold I walked and kept my soul full sad.
Thus did I go,—repenting, crushed and bruised,
For that dear angel's sake who wept for me.
Then Rome I gained at last, and at its shrine,
Its holiest shrine, I knelt in fervent prayer....
The daylight broke; the silver bells pealed forth;
'Neath vaulted roofs the heavenly hymns were sung;
A thousand voices rose exultantly,
For grace and mercy flowed o'er every soul.
There saw I him who holds the keys of heaven,
And prostrate fell the throngs before his face,
And thousands he forgave that day, and blessed,
And sent them forth renewed in heavenly grace.
Then drew I near, head bowed and eyes downcast;

The Pope's Pardon

Confessed my sin, in sorrow and despair;
Accused my darkened soul of mad desires;
Bewailed the fire no penitence had quenched;
And wildly cried for pardon and release. . . .
I thought he seemed at first most pitiful;
In tears and dust I craved one gracious word;
Then pity died within his kindly eye;
He looked at me most sternly and replied:
'If thou hast shared the joys of evil love,
And warmed thy soul in those unholy fires
Where Venus dwells in heathen blasphemy,
Then art thou now and evermore accurst!
Yea, sooner shall this seasoned staff I hold
Put forth in miracle fresh leaf or bloom
Than thy lost soul be snatched from lowest hell,
Or fair forgiveness ever bloom for thee!' . . .
Despair heartrending made my senses swim,
And down I sank. When I awoke again,
'T was night, and all forsaken, there I lay,
The only one of thousands so repulsed.
Far off I heard the songs of prayer and praise,
But deep damnation thundered in my soul, —
The sorrowing music of a deep despair.
Loathing the place I fled their holy hymns,
Fled from the lying clangor of their bells, —
Fled madly as though called, 'Unclean! Unclean!'
With horror in my heart I turned and fled. . . .
Then longed my soul again to taste those joys
That once had cured my earth-born pains and woe. . . .
And so, cast out, accurst by God and man,
Fair Venus, once again to thee I come!

The sweet night breathes thy magic witchery!
I come to thy dark courts as bounden slave!
Only be gracious and assuage my pains!"

The Pope's Pardon

Appalling was his mad ecstatic voice,
Then Wolfram cried: "Nay, nay, unhappy man!"
But still to Venus did Tannhäuser pray:
"O Venus, thou forgivest! Guide my feet!
How well in other days this road I knew!
Behold, I have been cursed and spurned of men!
Come, fairest Venus, take me once again!...
Ah, now methinks I see her fairy clouds
That softly float into the valley here,
And light the darkness with their rosy light!
Yea! dost thou not the balmy breezes feel,
And breathe her presence in the perfumed air?
Yea! hear the rapturous music sounding forth,—
Mysterious glory from the mountain's heart!
And see! in mazy dance the graceful nymphs!
See, see their ecstasy of whirling love!
Behold, the air is full of dancing forms!
Come on, ye fair ones! Pour me pleasure's draught!"

But Wolfram in a greater horror cried:
"Madman, away! Or thou art lost or dead!—
Yea, would that thou wert rather in thy grave!...
How wildly now he pants in shuddering joy!
What evil magic fills the darkened air
With visions that allure him to the depths?
What evil demons seem to crowd the night!"

Louder Tannhäuser called in frantic might:
"O rapture, bliss in all my throbbing heart!
I feel her dark ambrosial breath on me!
This is the magic realm of her sweet love!
Now, fairest Venus, I am here with thee!"...
And as he spake, the rifting clouds unclosed, —
The while mysterious music thrilled and throbbed, —
And lo! fair Venus, radiant in charms,
Reclining on a couch of rosy light.
Gently she spake with soft reproaches kind:
"Yea, thou art welcome, poor unfaithful soul!
The world has cursed thee with its hate and ban!
Nowhere on earth canst thou find pardon, peace!
So wouldst thou seek for solace in my love?"
Devoutly kneeling, glad Tannhäuser prayed:
"Yea, fairest Venus, great in tenderness,
Receive me in thy pity to thy heart!"
And Venus answered him with gracious smiles:
"If of thine own free will thou seekest me,
I will forgive thy rash unfaithfulness!
Come, then, and taste the fount of deathless joy,
The myriad joys within my radiant realms, —
And nevermore depart from my heart's love!"

But Wolfram tightly clutched him, crying loud:
"Begone, ye hellish phantoms! Quick, begone!
Ye banish every pure thought from our hearts!"
Fiercely Tannhäuser tore himself away,
With the wild words: "Nay, let me go, I say!
I am accurst and lost to hope on earth,

Naught but the joys of hell are left to me!"
But Wolfram clutched him tighter still and prayed:
"Almighty God, be pitiful and kind! . . .
Henry, one word, — forgiveness full it means, —
Repent!"
But angrily Tannhäuser cried:
"Nay, speak no more! Away from me, I say!"

Then Venus called again in wistful word:
"O come, beloved! Mine forever now!"
But Wolfram clung to him with desperate strength, —
Tannhäuser vainly struggling to get free, —
Exclaiming still: "I will not let thee go!
Thou must be saved! Thy sin must be forgiven!"
Tannhäuser, struggling, muttered with slow breath:
"Nay, never! Let me go! I must go down!
Wolfram, all hope is gone! The heavens are closed!"

But Wolfram cried: "Nay, heaven is open still!
An angel on the earth once prayed for thee, —
Now, even now, her spirit, winging flight,
Dropped blessing on thee as she rose to heaven!
With reverence deep I speak her holy name!
Angel of purity, her name I breathe —
Elizabeth! she prays for thee in heaven!"

Sudden Tannhäuser paused, nor struggled more;
He seemed awakening from some darksome dream;

And looking upward fervently he cried:
"Elizabeth! she prays for me in heaven!
O God, I do repent me in the dust!"
And in a torrent of repentant tears,
His whole soul throbbed and trembled in its woe.
And Wolfram came to him most tenderly;
Put round him his strong brotherly right arm,
And whispered to him: "Yea, thine angel prays!
She prays for thee before the very throne!
She prays, and God doth hear! Thy heart repents!
Henry, thou art forgiven! thou art forgiven!"

Faintly the voice of Venus sighed and sobbed:
"Woe! I have lost him now for evermore!"
And quick she vanished with her rosy clouds
And all the evil witchery of night. . . .

And now God's morning broke in fresh sweet light,
Pure as a soul but newly shrived for heaven,
A fair day for the sweet and holy earth,
A fair day for the sweet immortal life.

Forth from the Wartburg came a saddened throng,
With glimmering torches of funereal gloom,
In slow procession down the winding way;
And as they walked this solemn dirge they sang:

"RECEIVE, O Lord, this patient soul so bright
That now to Thee has gladly winged her flight;

"Hers be the blest reward to angels given,
Crowned with the glory and the joy of heaven;

"Sainted forever with that glorious band
Who robed in white before th' Eternal stand.

"And blest be he whose sins are all forgiven,
And by her prayers and tears at last gains heaven."

Faint with his grief, Tannhäuser trembling fell;
But Wolfram caught him gently in his arms,
And whispered: "Speak! dost hear their holy hymn
Of prayer and praise for her who is in heaven?"
Dying he murmured: "Yea, I hear the hymn."

Then nearer still the sad procession drew,
The Landgrave, knights and nobles following;
And like a bride of death on open couch
Lay fair Elizabeth, a saint of God,
Clothed in a simple robe of purest white,
Lustrous like her own soul's sweet purity;
And crowned and garlanded with pure white flowers, —
Herself the sweetest flower of all the world.

Then Wolfram brought Tannhäuser to the couch,
To gaze upon that sweet face still in death;
And coming near, Tannhäuser looked in love,
And bending o'er her body, prayed the prayer:

"Dear saint Elizabeth, O, pray for me!"
And with the words, he swooned, and breathed his last.

Thus were two suffering souls prepared for heaven,
And found each other after many days;
Thus was a pure and faithful woman's heart
Triumphant over all the wiles of sin.

For, as in awe, the bearers quenched their lights,
Inverting their funereal torches' flame;
And as the glorious morning sun burst forth
In greater glory o'er the mountain tops;
Another company of pilgrims came,
Returning from the holy shrines of Rome.
Across the mountain paths they slowly moved,
And to the valley wended their sad way;
Holding aloft a rough-hewn wooden cross,
Wreathed in fair flowers, for it was special gift
And special message from the Pope's own hand;
And as they walked they sang this wondrous strain:

"REJOICE! the gracious Lord hath marvels wrought!
He hath redemption to his people brought!
Behold his deed in night's most holy hour!
Behold his miracle of wondrous power!

"For lo! the Pontiff's staff, once dry and dead,
God hath renewed with blossoms bright and red!

So shall the sinner, dead in shame and sin,
Receive forgiveness, and new life begin!

"Tell wide the news! Raise high the gladsome voice!
And may each sinning, sorrowing heart rejoice!
High above all is God, the sinner's Friend!
His mercy and compassion have no end!"

So sang they, and the hearts of all were glad;
Redemption had been wrought before their eyes,
A lost soul saved at last by faith and love!
And all the throng, a motley company,
Knights, pilgrims, nobles, stirred with feeling deep,
United in one hymn of gratitude:

"PRAISE God with hallelujahs o'er and o'er!
Praise Him and sing hosannas evermore!
His pitying grace gives now its open token!
The Lord himself the bonds of sin hath broken!
Praises to God! ye angel hosts on high!
Praises to God! let every creature cry!
God's grace to every penitent is given!
The vilest sinner may at last win heaven!"

THE END